

Indian Wild Life

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A Tiger Seizing Bullock in a Pass

it is, wild life can still use it and must indeed have it if many of our most valuable species are to survive at all,

In dividing up our heritage we have made generous allotments of land to about every interest and purpose under the sun except our wild life. Our national wild life programme should first of all make provision for this disinherited legatee by withdrawal of publicly owned lands and by purchase of suitable tracts that are privately owned. Once set aside for wild life, these lands should never be released to other uses except upon clear proof that such use is of essential importance to the welfare of the Nation.

The Terror That Walks By Night

AN EPISODE OF THE INDIAN JUNGLES

By Major Jim Corbett; Editor.

HOWEVER little faith we have in the superstitions we share with others—thirteen at a table—the passing of wine at dinner—walking under a ladder—etc. etc., our own private superstitions, though a source of amusement to our friends, are very real to us.

I do not know if sportsmen are more superstitious than the rest of mankind, but I do know that they take their superstitions very seriously. One of my friends invariably takes five cartridges, never more and never less, when he goes out after big game, and another as invariably takes seven cartridges. Another, who incidentally was the best known big game sportsman in Northern India, never started the winter shooting season without first killing a Mah-
-ceer. My own private superstition concerns snakes. When after man-eaters I have a deep-rooted conviction that however much I may try, all my efforts will be unavailing, until I have first killed a snake.

During the hottest days of one May I had from dawn to dark climbed innumerable miles up and down incredibly steep hills, and through thick thorn bushes that had left my hands and knees a mass

of ugly scratches, in search of a very wary man-eater. I returned



on that fifteenth evening, dog-tired to the little two-roomed forest bungalow I was staying at, to find a deputation of villagers waiting for me, with the very welcome news that the man-eater, a tiger, had been seen that day on the outskirts of their village. It was too late to do anything that night, so the deputation were provided with lanterns and sent home with strict injunctions that no one was to leave the village the following day.

The village was situated at the extreme end of the ridge on which the bungalow was, and because of its isolated position and the thick forest that surrounded it, had suffered more from the depredations of the tiger than any other village in the district. The victims from this village were two women and one man.

I had made one complete circle of the village the following morning and had done the greater part of a second circle when after negotiating a difficult scree of shale, I came on a little 'nala'

made by the rush of rain-water down the steep hill-side. A glance up and down this nala satisfied me that the tiger was not in it, and then a movement just in front of me, and about twenty-five feet away, caught my eye. There was a small pool of water the size of a bath-tub and on the far side of it was a snake that had evidently been drinking. The lifting of the snake's head had caught my eye and it was not until the head been raised some two or three feet from the ground and the hood expanded that I realised it was a Hamadryad. It was the most beautiful snake I had ever seen. The throat, as I faced it, was a deep orange-red shading to golden-yellow where the body met the ground. The back, olive green, was banded by ivory coloured chevrons, and some four feet of its length from the tail upwards was polished black, with white chevrons. In length the snake was between thirteen and fourteen feet. One hears many tales about Hamadryads, their aggressiveness when disturbed, and the speed at which they can travel. If as it seemed about to do, the snake attacked, up or down hill, I would be at a disadvantage, but if across the shale scree, I felt that I could hold my own. A shot at the expanded hood, the size of a small plate, would have ended the tension, but the rifle in my hands was a heavy one and I had no intention of disturbing the tiger that had shown up after so many days of weary waiting and toil. After an interminably long minute, during which time the only movement was the flicking in and out of a long and quivering forked tongue, the snake closed his hood, lowered his head to the ground and turning, made off up the opposite slope. Without taking my eyes off the reptile I groped with my hand on the hill-side and picked up a stone that filled my hand as comfortably as a cricket ball. The snake had just reached a sharp ridge of hard clay when the stone, launched with the utmost energy I was capable of, struck it on the back of the head. The blow would have killed any other snake outright, but the only and very alarming effect it had on the Hamadryad was to make it whip round and come straight back towards me. A second and a larger stone fortunately caught it on the neck when it had covered half the distance between us, and after that the rest was easy. With a great feeling of satisfaction, I

completed the second circle round the village, and though it proved as fruitless as the first, I was elated at having killed the snake, for now for the first time in many days I had a feeling that my search for the man-eater would be successful.

The following day I again searched the forest surrounding the village and towards evening found the fresh pug-marks of the tiger under a bush at the edge of a field over-looking the village. The occupants of the village, numbering about a hundred, were by now thoroughly alarmed, and leaving them with the assurance that I would return early next day I set out on my lonely four-mile walk back to the forest bungalow.

To walk with safety, through forests or along deserted roads in an area in which a man-eating tiger is operating calls for the utmost caution and the strict observance of many rules. It is only when the hunter has repeatedly been the hunted that the senses can be attuned to the required pitch, and those rules be strictly adhered to, the breaking of which would provide the man-eater with an easy victim.

My reader may ask 'Why a lonely walk' when I probably had men with me in camp? The question would be a very natural one and for the sake of brevity I will give as short an answer as possible. First then, because one is apt to get careless and rely too much on one's companions. Second, because in a mix-up with a tiger one has a better chance when one is alone; and third, because risks in sport should not be shared.

The next morning as I approached the village I saw an eager throng of men awaiting me, and when within ear-shot I was greeted with the gratifying news that a buffalo had been killed during the night. The animal had been killed in the village and after being dragged some distance along the ridge had been taken down into a narrow, deep, and very heavily-wooded valley on the north side of the hill.

A very careful reconnaissance from a projecting rock on the ridge satisfied me that an approach down the steep hill, along

the line of the drag, would not be advisable and that the only thing to do was to make a wide detour, enter the valley from the lower end and work up to the spot where I expected to find the kill.

This manoeuvre was successfully accomplished and by mid-day I arrived at the spot marked from above where the valley flattened out for a hundred yards, before going straight up three hundred yards to the ridge above. It was at the upper end of this bit of ground that I expected to find the kill, and with luck, the tiger. The long and difficult climb up the valley through dense thickets of thorn bush and stunted bamboo had brought out a bath of sweat, and as it was not advisable to take on a job where quick firing might be necessary, with sweaty hands, I sat down for a much needed rest and a smoke.

The ground in front of me was strewn with large smooth boulders among which a tiny stream meandered, forming wherever possible small crystal-clear pools. Shod with the thinnest of rubber-soled shoes, the going over these boulders was ideal for my purpose and when I had cooled and dried I set off to stalk the kill in the hope of finding the tiger lying asleep near it. When three-quarters of the ground had been covered I caught sight of the kill tucked away under a thick bank of ferns, and about twenty-five yards from where the hill went steeply up to the ridge. The tiger was not in sight and very cautiously drawing level with the kill I took up my position on a flat boulder to scan every inch of ground visible to me.

The premonition of impending danger is too well-known and established a fact to need any comment. For three or four minutes, may have been longer, I had stood perfectly still with no thought of danger and then all at once, I became aware that the tiger was looking at me at a very short range. The same sense that had conveyed this feeling of impending danger to me had evidently operated in the same way on the tiger and awakened him from his sleep. To my left front were some thick bushes, growing on a bit of flat ground. On these bushes, distant fifteen to twenty feet

from me, and about the same distance from the kill my interest centred. Presently the bushes were gently stirred and the next second I caught sight of the tiger going full speed up the steep hill-side. Before I could get the rifle to bear on him he disappeared behind a creeper-covered tree and it was not until he had covered sixty or seventy yards that I again saw him, as he was springing up the face of a rock. At my shot, fired as he was springing, he fell backwards and came roaring down the hill, bringing an avalanche of stones with him. A broken back I concluded, and just as I was wondering how best to deal with him when he should arrive all-of-a-heep at my feet, the roaring ceased, and the next minute; as much to my relief as to my disappointment, I saw him going full-out, and apparently unwounded across the side of the hill. The momentary glances I caught of him offered no shot worth taking, and with a crash through some dry bamboos he disappeared round the shoulder of the hill into the next valley. My bullet I subsequently found, fired at an angle of seventy-five degrees, had hit the tiger on the left elbow and chipped out a big section from that bone, which has by some cynical humourist been named the 'funny bone'. Carrying on, the bullet had struck the rock and splashing back had delivered a smashing blow on the point of the jaw. Neither wound, however painful it may have been, was fatal, and the only result of my following up the very light blood trail into the next valley was to be growled at from a dense thorn thicket, to enter which would have been suicidal.

My shot had been heard in the village and an expectant crowd were waiting for me on the ridge and were even more disappointed, if that were possible, than I was at the failure of my carefully planned and as carefully executed stalk.

On visiting the kill the following morning I was very pleased and not a little surprised to find that the tiger had returned to it during the night and taken a light meal. The only way now of getting a second shot was to sit up over the kill and here a difficulty presented itself. There were no suitable trees within convenient distance of the kill, and the very unpleasant experience I had on a

former occasion, had effectively cured me of sitting at night on the ground for a man-eater. While still undecided where to sit I heard the tiger call some distance down the valley, up which I had climbed the previous day. The calling of the tiger offered me a very welcome chance of shooting it in the most pleasant way it is possible of bringing one of these animals to bag. The conditions under which a tiger can be called up are (a) when rampaging through the forest looking for a mate, and (b) when lightly wounded. It goes without saying that the sportsman must be able to call sufficiently well to deceive the tiger, and that the call must come from a spot to which the tiger will quite naturally come—a dense thicket, or a patch of heavy grass—and that he must be prepared to take his shot at a very close range. I am quite certain that many sportsmen will be sceptical of the statement that I have made that a lightly wounded tiger will come to a call. I would ask all such to reserve their judgment, until they have tried the experiment for themselves. On this particular occasion, however, though the tiger answered me, call for call, for upwards of an hour, he refused to come any nearer, and I attributed my failure to the fact that I was calling from the spot where the previous day he had met with an unfortunate experience.

The tree I finally selected was growing on the very edge of a perpendicular bank and had a convenient branch about eight feet from the ground. When sitting on this branch I would be thirty feet from, and directly above, the boulder-strewn ravine up which I expected the tiger to come. The question of the tree settled, I returned to the ridge where I had instructed my men to meet me with breakfast.

By four o'clock in the evening I was comfortably seated on the branch and prepared for a long and hard sit-up. Before leaving my men I had instructed them to 'coo-ee' to me from the ridge at sun-rise next morning and if I answered with the call of a leopard to sit tight, but if they received no answer, to form two parties with as many villagers as they could collect and come down on either side of the valley, shouting and throwing stones.

I have acquired the habit of sleeping in any position on a tree and as I was tired, the evening did not pass unpleasantly, and as the setting sun was gilding the hill-tops above me, I was roused to full consciousness by the alarm call of a langoor, (*Entellus monkey*). I soon located the monkey sitting in a tree-top on the far side of the valley and as it was looking in my direction I concluded it had mistaken me for a leopard. The alarm call was repeated at short intervals, and finally ceased as darkness came on. Hour after hour I strained my eyes and ears and was suddenly startled by a stone, rolling down the hill-side, and striking my tree. The stone was followed by the stealthy padding of a heavy soft-footed animal, unmistakably the tiger. At first I comforted myself with the thought that his coming in this direction, instead of up the valley, was accidental, but this thought was soon dispelled, when he started to emit low deep growl from immediately behind me. Quite evidently he had come into the valley while I was on the ridge having breakfast, and taking up a position on the hill, where the monkey had later seen him, had watched me climbing into the tree. Here was a situation I had not counted on and one that needed careful handling. The branch that had provided a comfortable seat while day-light lasted, admitted of no change of position in the dark, I could have of course fired off my rifle into the air, but the terrible results I have seen following an attempt to drive away a tiger at very close quarters by discharging a gun, dissuaded me from taking this action. Further, even if the tiger had not attacked, the discharge of the heavy rifle so near him would probably have made him leave the locality and all my toil would have gone for nothing. I knew the tiger would not spring, for that would have carried him straight down a drop of thirty feet on to the rocks below, but there was no need for him to spring, for by standing on his hind legs he could easily reach me. Lifting the rifle off my lap and reversing it, I pushed the barrel between my left arm and side, depressing the muzzle and slipping up the safety catch as I did so. This movement was greeted with a deeper growl than any that had preceded it. If the tiger now reached up for me he would in all probability come in contact

with the rifle, round the trigger of which my fingers were crooked, and even if I failed to kill him the confusion following on my shot would give me a sporting chance of climbing higher up into the tree. Time dragged by on leaden feet, and eventually tiring of prowling about the hill-side and growling, the tiger sprang across a little ravine on my left and a few minutes later I heard the welcome sound of a bone being cracked at the kill. At last I was able to relax in my uncomfortable position and the only sounds I heard for the rest of the night came from the direction of the kill.

The sun had been up but a few minutes and the valley was still in deep shadow when my men 'coo-ee' from the ridge, and almost immediately afterwards I caught sight of the tiger making off at a fast canter up, and across, the hill on my left. In the uncertain light and with my night-long strained eyes the shot was a very difficult one, but I took it, and had the satisfaction of seeing the bullet going home. Turning with a great roar, he came straight for my tree, and he was in the act of springing, the second bullet, with great good fortune, crashed into his chest. Diverted in his spring by the impact of the heavy bullet, he struck the tree just short of me, and recocheting off it, went headlong the valley below, where his fall was broken by one of the small pools already alluded to. Floundering out of the water which he left dyed red with his blood, he went lumbering down the valley and out of sight. Fifteen hours on the hard branch had cramped every muscle in my body, and it was not until I had swarmed down the tree, staining my clothes in the great gouts of blood the tiger had left on it, and had massaged my stiff limbs, that I was able to follow him. He had gone but a short distance, and I found him lying dead at the foot of a rock in another pool of water. Contrary to my orders, the men collected on the ridge on hearing my shot, and the tiger's roar, followed a second shot, came helter skelter down the hill. Arrived at the blood-stained tree, at the foot of which my soft hat was lying, they not unnaturally concluded I had been carried off by the tiger. Hearing their shouts of alarm I called out to them, and again they came runnig

down the valley, only to be brought up with a gasp of dismay when they saw my blood-stained clothes. Reassured on this point, a moment later they were crowding around the tiger. A stout sapling was soon cut and lashed to it by creepers, the tiger, with no little difficulty, and a great deal of shouting, was carried to the village.

The accompanying photograph is of the tiger and the father of one of its last victims, an only son, who two days before his untimely death had, to the great joy of his father, been accepted as a recruit in that famous Regiment, The 2nd Battalion Garhwal Rifles.

* To give the start to the Bird Club, we are in a position to announce two prizes of Rupees Five each, for the best study of Birds in painting and in photography. Names and addresses of competitors should be written legibly and pictures should be sent to the Managing Editor.